COOPER-HEWITT MUSEUM

MATCHSAFES

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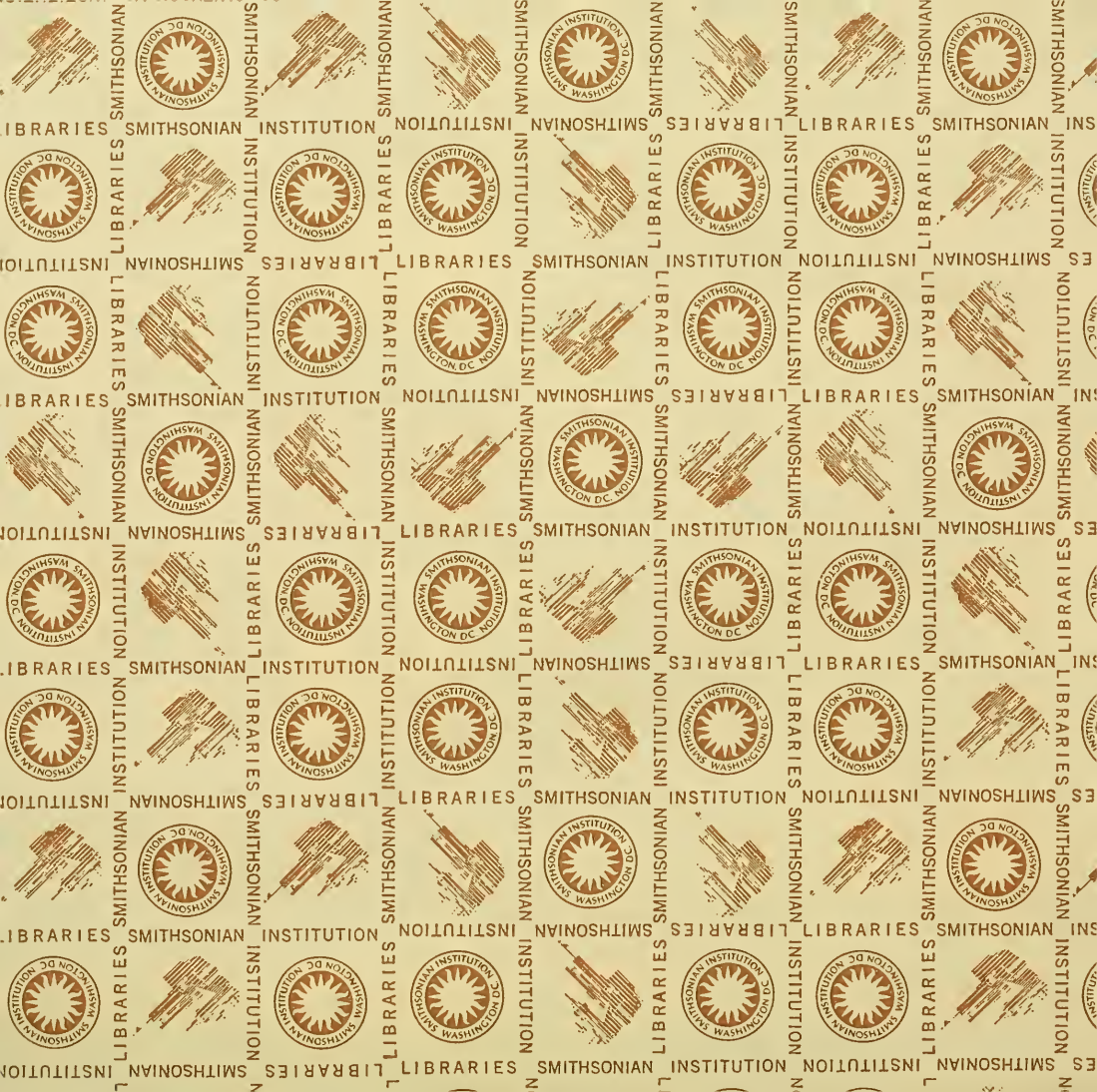
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION LIBRARIES

Matchsafes

in the Collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design

Matchsafes

NK
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CHM

in the Collection
of the
Cooper-Hewitt
Museum

The Smithsonian
Institution's
National Museum
of Design

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Foreword

Protective containers for carrying matches, or matchsafes as they were called, enjoyed immense popularity for seventy-five years before losing favor to matchbooks and lighters. Seldom do commonplace products with so specific a purpose show as much imagination and diversity in the use of materials, technique, and decoration.

A rare and extraordinary collection of matchsafes is housed in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. It contains over 4,200 cases exquisitely executed in every conceivable medium. With beauty, skill, charm, and sometimes humor, they evoke in miniature the spirit of an entire age.

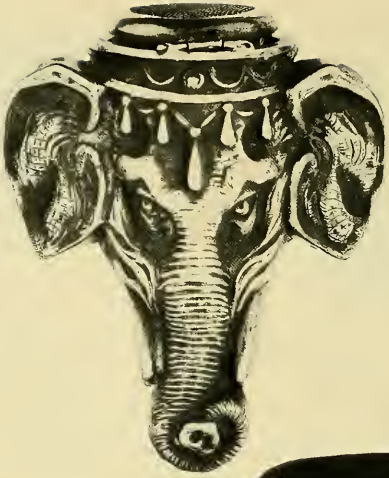
The matchsafes in the Cooper-Hewitt were lovingly assembled by Carol B. Brener and Stephen W. Brener over a period of fifteen years. We are deeply indebted to them for entrusting this delightful collection to our care. In addition, we are grateful to Mr. Brener for enabling us to share it with you by making this publication possible.

Lisa Taylor
Director

1. S.M. & Co., London, England; 1891-92
Silver, enamel

2. Probably England; about 1900
Brass

3.



6.

4.

5.

7.

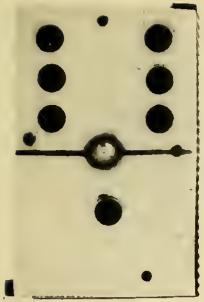
3. S.B.S. Ltd., Birmingham, England; 1939-40
Silver, enamel

4. Germany; late 19th century
Silver, enamel

5. Europe; about 1900
Silver, basse taille and painted enamel
Imported and sold by ~~H.C.~~, H. L., Birmingham, England, 1901-02

6. Probably Europe; c. 1900
Silver-plated brass

7. Japan; late 19th century
Iron, gold *zogan* (inlay)



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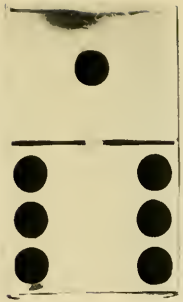

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Instantaneous flame produced at will was a 19th-century invention, and its first manifestation was the friction match. Although friction had been producing fire for thousands of years, starting a fire was never really easy before the match came into general use. The most primitive method of fire-making, rubbing a stick through a groove, was only possible under certain conditions and was extremely slow. Even the later method, using flint and steel with a tinder box containing combustible material, was tedious and difficult unless the equipment was dry and clean. In the late 18th century, experimentation led to a primitive form of match, a wooden splint with a tip soaked in sulfur which ignited when dipped into a bottle of phosphoric acid. This method of starting a fire was awkward, required several pieces of equipment, and involved potentially dangerous toxic chemicals.

These unsatisfactory methods meant that, on the whole, once a fire was lighted, it was kept alive at all costs. There was a very good reason for banking a fire at night to be coaxed into flame in the morning and for "borrowing a light" from a neighbor. The household fire was not casually extinguished. The invention of the friction match, which meant that a fire could be started quickly when needed, had a profound effect on the daily routine of life.

John Walker, a middle-aged druggist living in Stockton-on-Tees, England in the early 19th century, was the inventor of the first successful match, a wooden splint coated with sulfur and tipped with a mixture of sulfide of antimony, chlorate of potash, and gum. At first Walker referred to his invention as "sulphurata hyperoxygenata friction," but that name, understandably, did not catch on, so he began to call the match a "friction light." The matches were offered to the public in a cylindrical tin box with a folded

11.

8. Europe; early 20th century
Celluloid, bakelite, brass

9. J.D. and W?, Chester, England; 1899-1900
Silver, enamel

10. Probably Eastern Europe; late 19th century
Silver filigree

11. J.B., London, England; 1891-92
Silver

12.

13.

14.

15.

piece of sandpaper that served as a striking surface. They sold for the rather stiff price of one shilling twopence, the shilling for the matches, twopence for "the tin case." The date of the first sale of these matches is known—April 7, 1827. Walker apparently failed to make much money from his great invention. The same product was marketed much more successfully after 1829 by Samuel Jones under the catchy name "lucifer," which has survived in Britain right up to the present. His shop, appropriately called "The Light House," was located in the Strand, London. As is usual in the history of inventions, one led to another rather quickly. In 1831 a phosphorus match was invented in France by Charles Sauria, and in 1836 J.D. Phillips was selling a similar match in the United States. Wax matches, called "vestas," were first produced around 1840, taking their name from the Roman goddess in whose shrines perpetual fire burned. In 1855 the safety match was invented by J.D. Lundstrom of Sweden. The "strike anywhere" type of match was patented in 1888 by Frederick W. Farnham.

Early matches, although an enormous improvement in fire making, were still somewhat perilous to carry; they ignited when they were accidently knocked or heated. They had to be kept in a secure container which became known as a "matchsafe." Matchsafes were made to carry on one's person, usually in a pocket or on a watch chain, or to sit on a table. The history of these containers, which were produced in enormous numbers over a 75-year period, illustrates many phases of the design and decoration of a practical object in the second half of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th. The Brener Collection, considered the largest ever assembled, contains well over 4,000 different matchsafes, mostly of the pocket type, and makes possible an intriguing study into the decorative design of the last century.

16.

12. England; late 19th century
Wood mosaic on wood
"Tunbridge Wells ware"

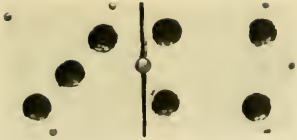
13. Probably France; late 19th century
Silver-gilt, enamel

14. S.M., London, England; 1881-82
Silver
Made for Bowler and Jones,
71 Piccadilly

15. W.N., Birmingham, England;
1891-92
Silver

16. S.M. & Co., Chester, England;
1905-06
Silver
Inscribed "Strike boldly, then your light will shine clear"

17.



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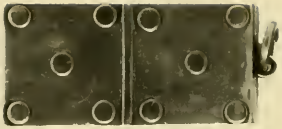

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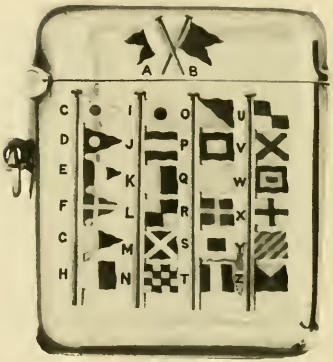

22.

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17. T.J., London, England; 1881–82
Silver, enamel

18. G.W. & Sons, Birmingham, England;
1908–09
Silver, enamel

19. Unmarked, probably England; late
19th century
Celluloid, brass

20. Gorham Corp., United States; ~~1880~~ 1897
Silver, enamel

21. H.T.B., Birmingham, England;
1891–92
Silver, copper

22. H.B.S., London, England; 1930–31
Silver, enamel

23.

25.

26.

27.

24.

It appears that few, if any, matchsafes were made until about 1850—and even then manufacture developed rather slowly—but by the 1870s numerous patents began to be taken out for new forms. The book match, now ubiquitous, was invented in 1892 by John Pusey, but was not quickly accepted into the hearts and pockets of smokers. Until the invention of the pocket gasoline lighter around 1918, pocket matchsafes, both utilitarian and decorative, were immensely popular objects.

Certain features are common to matchsafes. The match must be struck against a rough surface, so one of the sides, an interior surface, or the base of the container is serrated and referred to as "the striker." The lids of matchsafes usually have an interior spring and open with a smart—and attractive—snap. A strong spring was necessary to keep the safe from falling open in the pocket. The interiors of silver boxes are treated in some way, often with gilding, to prevent the chemicals on match tips from corroding the silver. In its simplest form, the matchsafe is a rectangular box, between one and a half and three inches long, with a hinged lid. But the form is rarely simple. Victorian and Edwardian ingenuity was exercised to the limit in constructing matchsafes. Many have a small socket, for example, in which a match can be inserted while it burns. This was useful with sealing wax or for lighting candles or lamps. Matchsafes even exist in which an entire candle can be inserted. There is sometimes a separate compartment for used matches.

23. H.C.F., London, England; 1905-06
Silver, enamel

24. Probably England; about 1895
Silver, enamel
Imported by Carl Hess, Vienna

25. R.B.S., Birmingham, England; 1898-99
Silver, enamel

26. J.C. & Sons, Birmingham, England; 1905-06
Silver, enamel

27. Germany; early 20th century
Gilded base metal, enamel
Stamped: "Ge schützt"

28.

30.

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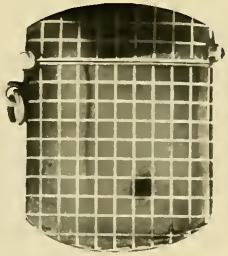
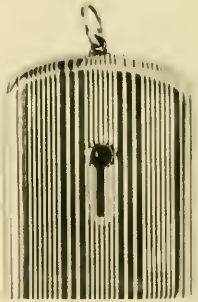
33.

29.



31.

The development of the design of matchsafes shows them to have begun as quite simple boxes, gradually becoming more elaborate both in construction and decoration. High Victorian matchsafes tend to be heavy and ornate. Later in the century there came on the market matchsafes incorporating knives, pencils, coin holders, and other useful objects. The early 20th-century matchsafes were simpler again in design, but more elegant, as though the usefulness had been superseded by the decorative quality. Those made after the First World War, especially those of Art Deco designs from the 1930s, were often restrained in design but luxurious in feel and appearance.



34.

28. Probably France; late 19th century
Tortoiseshell or horn, gold piqué work

29. Possibly Australia or for the Australian market; late 19th century
Chestnut, silver-gilt

30. Probably Italy; about 1900
Gilded metal filigree

31. Possibly Hungary; early 20th century
Silver, niello

32. Europe; early 20th century
Agate, nickel-plated metal

33. Possibly United States; early 20th century
Agate, aventurine, gilded metal

34. Cartier, Paris and London; early 20th century
Gold, sapphire

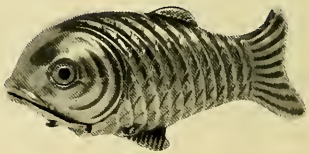
35.

36.

37.

Matchsafes with complicated or trick devices for opening them are frequently found. A number have smug sayings inscribed on the lids, such as one labelled "Help Yourself" that is impossible to open without knowing the combination. Another trick matchsafe, also serving as an advertisement, lures the unsuspecting person with the inscription "Open this box and I'll stand you a Johnnie Walker."

The imagination of the designers and manufacturers of matchsafes was exuberant and unflagging. In addition to the usual rectangular box form, matchsafes were produced in the form of birds and animals such as sheep, dolphins, eagles, owls, turtles, rabbits, elephants, horses, and monkeys, and even the less attractive fauna such as frogs, rats, and snakes. There are matchsafes in the form of skulls, mummies, crowns, insects, the devil's head, shells, musical instruments, books, barrels, shoes (a very popular form, especially in Russia), horseshoes, breeches, coffins, Punch's head, and dominoes in ivory or sterling silver. All of these forms are represented in the Brener Collection by one or more examples.



38.

39.

35. J.B. and L.W., London, England; 1900–01
Silver, blue enamel

36. United States; early 20th century
Nickel-plated brass

37. Japan; late 19th century
Patinated copper, gilding

38. Europe; late 19th-early 20th century
Brass, glass

39. Chinese, for the western market; late 19th century
Silver
Stamped: "Wang Hing"

40.

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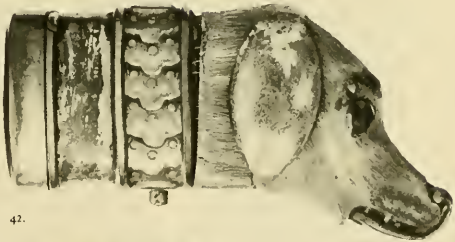
41.



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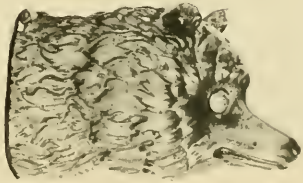


43.

46.

40. Probably England; c. 1880
Silver-plated brass

41. Japan; late 19th century
Copper, gilding

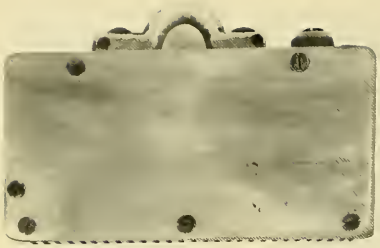
42. England or United States; late 19th century
Nickel-plated brass, hide, glass

43. Probably England; early 20th century
Brass, pink rhinestones

44. Japan; late 19th century
Brass

45. Japan; late 19th century
Brass

46. England; late 19th century
Brass, enamel



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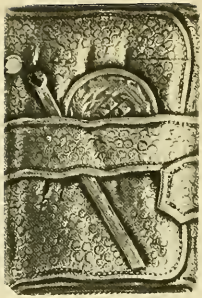
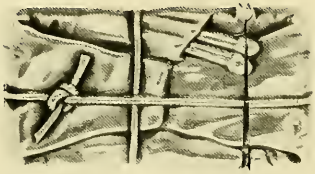


50.

A large category, extending from the earliest matchsafes to the latest, are in the form of containers of various sorts. Some of the earliest Victorian matchsafes were miniature leather-covered dispatch boxes. Suitcases were made in ivory, bone, and wood. Others were wrapped mailing packages, pouches, and pocketbooks, the last form being especially common. Dance cards had a list of dances sketched on the ivory cover of the matchsafe and came complete with pencil for filling in the card. An example in the Brener Collection is dated March 17, 1894.



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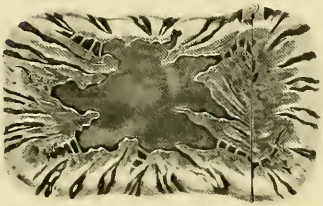


49.

52.

47. Probably United States; late 19th century
Bone, wood
Patented October 14, 1890

48. United States; late 19th century
Silver

49. Pairpoint Manufacturing Co., New Bedford, Massachusetts; late 19th century
Silver-plated white metal

50. United States; about 1900
Silver

51. United States; about 1890
Silver, enamel
Addressed to: "Mr. Fred K. Smyth, 15 West 46th Street"

52. G.U., Birmingham, England; 1877-78
Silver

53.

54.

55.

57.

As for the materials in which matchsafes were made, they include silver, gold, brass, nickel, tin, copper, wood, lacquer, leather, ivory, cork, glass, hardstones, and tortoiseshell as well as horn, bone, pewter, aluminum, papier-mâché, and even nuts.

Although matches and matchsafes were of general utility, their primary service at the time when most were produced was to smokers, especially when the smoker was outdoors. (Indoors, there were flames from candles, lamps, and fireplaces for lighting pipes and cigars.) Smoking was frowned on by various segments in Victorian society beginning at the top with the Queen herself, who was horrified by the practice. It was with the greatest difficulty that, late in her reign, she was persuaded to set aside a "smoking room" for male members of her own family. Her example was followed in many households; for a long time smoking was a habit largely indulged in outside the house.

56.

Smoking became more widespread in the latter years of Victoria's reign, and by the time her son, the Prince of Wales and an inveterate smoker, came to the throne as King Edward VII in 1901, the smoking of cigars and cigarettes was very widespread indeed. As far as women were concerned, however, as late as 1909 the Italian composer Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari could write a successful opera called *Il Segreto di Susanna* in which the secret is not infidelity but the fact that Susanna smokes cigarettes and has to conceal her smoking from her husband.

53. Europe; late 19th century
Brass, pierced overlay simulating filigree

54. Probably France; late 19th century
Horn, gold piqué work

55. Probably England; late 19th century
Wood

56. H.S. and Co., probably England; late 19th century
Silver, gold, enamel

57. Possibly United States; early 20th century
Gold, gold ore, green onyx, quartz

58.

59.

60.

Most matchsafes of the 19th century, it is safe to say, were intended for male users. A number of the smaller matchsafes have rings for attaching them to watch chains. Sometimes they were carried in vest pockets. The heaviness of many pocket matchsafes is a commentary on the substantial fabrics then used for men's suits.

Some matchsafes were made with devices such as windscreens for use outdoors. Smoking, especially while on shooting or other outdoor sporting expeditions, was very much the habit among men of the leisure classes. The Brener Collection contains many matchsafes whose design is inspired by sport, such as silver matchsafes in the form of deer hooves or a beaver's foot with the fur intact. A combination matchsafe and cigarette box that is particularly attractive is a presentation box dated 1873 from Prince Philip of Coburg to a Captain Plowden engraved as "a friendly souvenir of a tiger expedition."

61.

58. A.V., probably Hungary; 20th century
Silver, enamel

59. Europe; late 19th century
Silver-plated white metal, enamel

60. Europe; late 19th century
Nickel-plated metal, enamel

61. A.K., Austria-Hungary; about 1893
Silver, niello
Gift of Prince Philip of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Captain Plowden as a souvenir of a tiger hunt

62.

63.

64.

The arms, mottoes, and devices of numerous fraternal organizations are to be found on a number of matchsafes. In the Brener Collection, the orders and lodges represented include the Independent Order of the Free Sons of Israel, the Improved Order of Red Men, Modern Woodmen of America, the Freemasons, the Knights of Pythias, and the Fraternal Order of Eagles, all at that time male organizations.

The essentially masculine character of Victorian and Edwardian matchsafes is amply demonstrated by the number that contain cigar cutters, compasses, dice, whistles, and whiskey flasks. One in the collection is fitted onto a wristwatch band. This masculine orientation is also borne out in a number of "naughty" matchsafes featuring scantily-clad women in the style of "French postcards," and a few that are crudely pornographic. A whole series of matchsafes depict the voluptuous heroine of Jules Massenet's 1897 opera *Sapho*, which was an international success.

65.

66.

62. Japan; late 19th century
Patinated copper

63. United States; late 19th century
Gold, gold ore
Inscribed: "Bro. S. Hoffheimer, from members of Pioneer Lodge no. 87 I.O.F.S. of I. (Independent Order of the Free Sons of Israel) Instituted April 28-1878"

64. G.S. and F.S., London, England; 1885-86
Silver, enamel

65. France; about 1900
Enamel, brass

66. Probably France; late 19th century
Silver-plated base metal, enamel

67.

69.

70.

71.

68.

The heyday of the matchsafe was an aggressively commercial age, and it was not long before manufacturers found that matchsafes, decorated with a printed or engraved mercantile message or even made to resemble a product, were an excellent way to keep their name before the public. Some boxes were made with a glass or celluloid window in which advertising cards or photographs could be inserted with the manufacturer's message.

"Recommend and always use Dr. Lovelace's Family Soap" is a typical simple slogan to be found on a matchsafe. Others told a longer story. One matchsafe in the Brener Collection reads, for example, "Charles Baker and Co. Stores match and pin box... Gentlemen and Boys superior clothing, hosiery, shirts, hats, boots etc. 25 per cent under usual London prices to keep pace with the Civil Service Stores." The firm, which was in High Holborn, London, sold their matchsafe for twopence. The American firm of Wolf, Sayer, and Heller at 37 Pearl Street, New York City advertised their sausage casings, imported potato flour, and butcher supplies on a matchsafe. The Sharples Cream Separator Company showed their works, "the largest in the world," at Canal and Washington Streets in Chicago, and boasted that their Tubular Cream Separator was "Different from the Others." Some insurance companies capitalized on word play, as in "I am safe because insured by..." used by the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company for their Christmas greetings in 1915. A seed company asserted that "Our seeds are matchless."

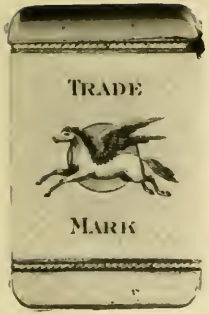
67. England; about 1900
Nickel-plated metal, enamel
Made for Colman's Mustard

68. United States; early 20th century
Bakelite
Made for Klump's Shoes, Watertown, New York

69. Made in the U.S.A. for The Whitehead and Hoag Co., London, England; late 19th-early 20th century
Nickel-plated metal, printed celluloid
Made for Sutton's Seeds

70. United States; late 19th century
Nickel-plated brass, printed celluloid
Made for S.J. Moreland & Sons, Gloucester, Massachusetts

71. The Whitehead and Hoag Co., Newark, New Jersey; early 20th century
Nickel-plated brass, printed celluloid
Made for "Cawston Ostrich Farm, South Pasadena, California"



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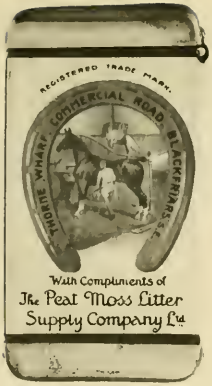

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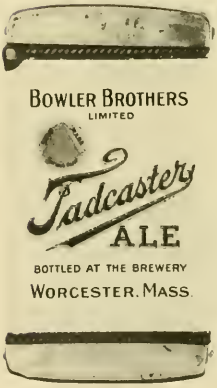


77.

72. Made in the U.S.A. for The Whitehead and Hoag Co., London, England; late 19th-early 20th century

73. The Whitehead and Hoag Co., Newark, New Jersey; about ~~1907~~ 1905
Nickel-plated metal, printed celluloid
Made for ~~Whitehall Portland Cement Co., Cementon, Pennsylvania~~ S. Bent + Bros., Newark, N.J.

74. England; late 19th-early 20th century
Nickel-plated metal, printed celluloid
Made for The Peat Moss Litter Supply Company Ltd.

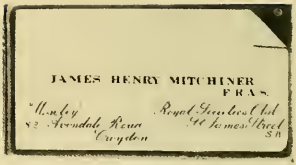
75. M.&W., Sheffield, England; 1913-14
Silver, blue enamel
Made for Wormald's Locks, "A Match For All"

76. W.J.D., Birmingham, England; 1894-95
Silver (engraved), enamel
Made for Otto Monsted's Margarines

77. The Whitehead and Hoag Co., Newark, New Jersey; early 20th century
Nickel-plated metal, printed celluloid
Made for Bowler Brothers Limited brewery, Worcester, Massachusetts

78.

80.



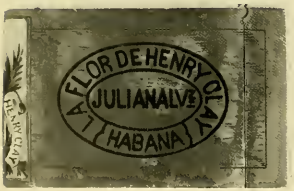
81.

Some of the advertising matchsafes are quite elegant. The Brener Collection contains a number of safes in the form of miniature silver cigar boxes advertising such brands as the "Flor de Henry" and "The Henry Clay." Manufacturers used matchsafes as a vehicle for advertisements as well as for promotional contests.

The dignified *Scribner's Magazine* had a matchsafe showing a typical cover, and even *The Scientific American* distributed a matchsafe in the form of the magazine in a mailing wrapper completely addressed to a subscriber.

Hunter's Baltimore Rye distributed a matchsafe depicting a jumping horse promising that its whiskey is "First Over the Bars." Perhaps the most amusing of the advertising safes are those put out by the famous British bakers Huntley & Palmer in the form of a silver biscuit.

82.



79.

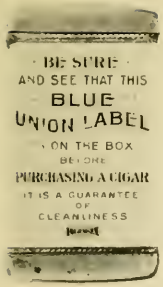
78. Unmarked, probably United States; late 19th century
Silver, enamel
Made for "Flor De Henry Clay, Habana"

79 Unmarked, probably United States; late 19th century
Silver, enamel
Made for "Flor De Henry Clay, Habana"

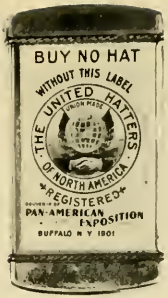
80. Diffany and Co., Newark, New Jersey; about 1900
Silver-plated base metal
Made for "El Telegrafo, Key West, factory #60"

81. London, England; 1903–04
Silver, enamel
Made for "James Henry Mitchener, F.R.A.S."

82. Gorham Manufacturing Co., Providence, Rhode Island, about 1887
Silver, printed ceramic



83.



84.

86.

The age was also the time when labor began to organize, and some of the most interesting—and relatively rare—matchsafes in the Brener Collection are those distributed by unions to carry various messages to the public. A matchsafe dated 1880 is marked "Smoke only union made cigars" and was distributed by the Cigar Maker's International Union of America. Another, with a more startling message, reads "Before purchasing a cigar, be sure and see that this blue union label is on the box. It represents living wages and not child labor." The United Hatters of North America reminded smokers in 1901 "Buy no hat without this label," and a late box, dating from about 1919, reads "International Union of the United Brewery Workmen of America ask your support against Prohibition as it is detrimental to all."

85.

Great international exhibitions were very much typical of the same period, and matchsafes showing views of fair grounds and exhibition halls were in wide circulation. The Brener Collection contains a wide selection of these colorful matchsafes, including souvenirs of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1892-93, the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo of 1901 (particularly well represented), and the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908. Several matchsafes from the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, 1904, display the portraits of Napoleon and Jefferson, who arranged the Purchase.

83. The Whitehead and Hoag Co., Newark, New Jersey; early 20th century
Nickel-plated brass, printed celluloid
Made for the Cigar Maker's Union No. 39, New Haven, Connecticut

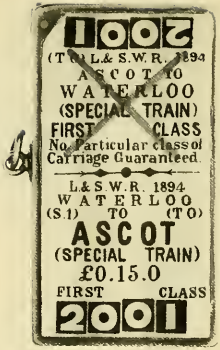
84. United States; 1901
Nickel-plated brass, printed celluloid
Souvenir of the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, New York; made for the United Hatters of North America

85. Coshocton Specialty Co., Coshocton, Ohio; early 20th century
Nickel-plated brass, printed celluloid
Made for the Cigar Maker's International Union of America

86. The Whitehead and Hoag Co., Newark, New Jersey; early 20th century
Nickel-plated brass, printed celluloid
Made for the International Union of the United Brewery Workmen of America, Cincinnati, Ohio

87.

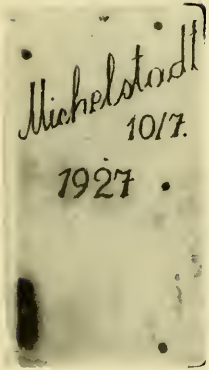
89.



91.

93.

94.



88.

90.

92.

87. Frank M. Whiting Co., North Attleboro, Massachusetts; c. 1892
Sterling silver
Made for the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1892

88. Probably Germany; about 1927
Ivory

89. The Whitehead and Hoag Co., Newark, New Jersey; 1901
Nickel-plated base metal, printed celluloid
Made for the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, New York, 1901

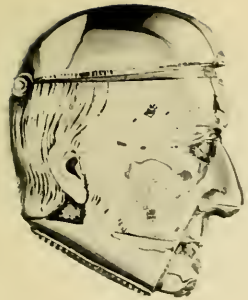
90. Gorham Corp., United States; about 1900
Silver, enamel
Inscribed: "From J.L. Steiner to his friend Wm. B. Birge, Paris, 1900"

91. London, England; 1893-94
Silver, enamel

92. Possibly Germany; early 20th century
White metal, enamel

93. Scotland; late 19th century
Printed paper, wood, ivory
"Tartan ware," "Stuart" clan

94. England; late 19th century
Wood mosaic on wood
"Tunbridge Wells ware"



95.

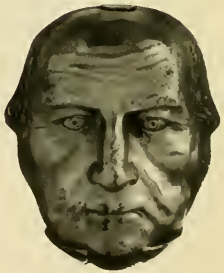
97.

99.

"The Centennial Match 1776-1876" was a commemorative safe sold in New York by Hill & Cooke, but produced under patent by Bryant & May in London, major producers of matches and matchsafes. There is a "Remember the Maine" matchsafe and one commemorating the Battle of Khartoum in 1885. A rather odd assortment of notables was honored by portrait boxes, among them Christopher Columbus, Queen Victoria, Ulysses S. Grant, "Bonnie Prince Charlie" (on tartan boxes), Dr. David Livingstone, Bismarck, Daniel Boone, Napoleon III, Grover Cleveland, and the philanthropist George Peabody.

96.

98.



100.

95. England; about 1900
Silver-plated base metal

96. United States; patented October 25, 1892
Nickel-plated brass

97. England; about 1900
Silver-plated base metal

98. United States; late 19th century
Nickel-plated brass

99. England; about 1900
Base metal

100. England; about 1900
Base metal

101.

102.

104.

Souvenirs of places range from matchsafes showing a scene in Weston-super-Mare, England to Treasury Street in St. Augustine, Florida. The arms of various British towns and cities, including Belfast, Worcester, Peebles, Exeter, Derby, and Dublin appear on various matchsafes. A number of these souvenir matchsafes are of special interest today when photographic history is an important subject, as they contain actual photographs either set in the lids of the matchsafes or transferred to them. Notable examples in the Brener Collection are photographs of the Green Dragon Hotel, Sheffield, England, and "Ye Olde Freemasons, Hastings," England. Among other photographic items is a rare portrait of one W. Miller dated 1876.

103.

101. United States; about 1900
Printed wood
Illustrates Treasury Street, St. Augustine, Florida

102. Bryant and May, London; 1893
Printed tin
Illustrates the Agricultural Building, Chicago World's Fair, 1893

103. United States; about 1876
Brass, tintype image

104. Germany; about 1900
Silver, enamel

105.

106.

108.

110.

Japanese art and manufacture greatly influenced advanced European and American design during the late 19th century, and the Brener Collection contains a variety of matchsafes produced in Japan. These include some charming animals such as a cat shown playing a samisen, rabbits, monkeys, and lions (sometimes shown with a rabbit). These are all metalwork but the collection also contains many rare examples of Chinese silver matchsafes and one gold matchsafe made for the export market.

107.

109.

111.

105. Japan; about 1900
Silver, enamel

106. Japan; late 19th century
Brass

108. Japan; late 19th century
Patinated copper, gilding

110. Japan; late 19th century
Patinated copper, gilding

107., 109., 111. Japan; late 19th century
Shakudo, gold *zogan* (inlay)

112.

114.

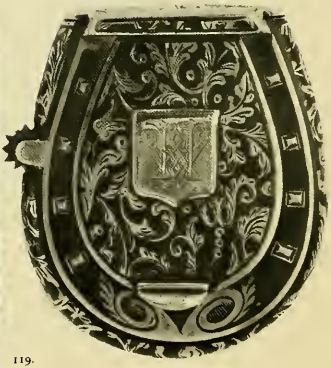
116.

118.

113.

115.

117.



119.

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112. Probably Europe; late 19th century
Silver-gilt, enamel (simulated cloisonné)

113. Japan; late 19th century
Cloisonne enamel, silver

114. T.K., Russia; about 1900
Silver-gilt, cloisonné enamel

115. Russia; late 19th century
Silver-gilt, basse taille enamel, topaz

116. Possibly England; late 19th-early 20th century
Wood

117. M. & S., Austria-Hungary; late 19th century
Silver, niello

118. Possibly India; late 19th-early 20th century
Wood

119. L. Du Bois, France; 19th century
Silver and black enamel, gold monogram shield

120.

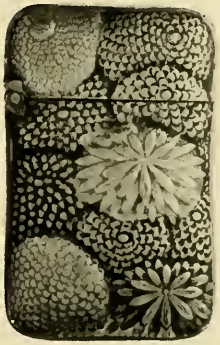
121.

123.

125.

Even at the time, trick cases and matchsafes produced in bizarre shapes aroused some criticisms. In 1894, the British writer Jerome K. Jerome protested matchsafes in the form of hunting horns, trick cases, and a case he was offered with a whistle in one end; he wrote indignantly of "the attempt of inventors to disguise articles of everyday use in some ridiculous form."

Matchsafes could cost very little or they could be articles of great luxury and expense. In 1897, the Sears Roebuck catalogue offered matchsafes made of "fine nickel" in varying grades at 10, 14, and 25 cents. By 1922, they cost 48 or 50 cents (but by then a gasoline or alcohol lighter was available for only 19 cents). Other firms offered matchsafes in the period before the First World War, when prices were very stable, at around a dollar. Specially commissioned matchsafes or those by famous makers cost many times those amounts, and the Brener Collection is rich in such fine work. A gold Australian matchsafe is decorated with a kangaroo and an emu in relief. Other matchsafes are executed in hardstones, especially agate and nephrite.



122.

124.

120. Europe; early 20th century
Silver, enamel

121. England; about 1900
Silver-plated base metal

122. Japan; early 20th century
Brass

123. Possibly Italy; late 19th-early 20th century
Moss agate, base metal

124. Busson, France; about 1900
Gold, basse taille enamel

125. M. Janest (?), Paris, France; late 19th century
Burled wood, gold, white enamel, brilliants

126.

129.

131.

127.

128.

130.

132.

126. Germany; late 19th century
Wood, stone, mother-of-pearl

127. Japan; late 19th century
Patinated brass

128 Probably China; late 19th century
White metal, enamel simulating champlevé work

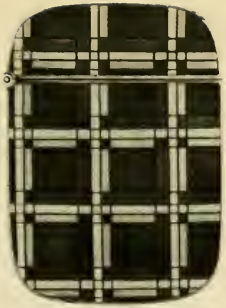
129. J.C. and Sons, Birmingham, England; 1908-09
Silver, champlevé enamel
Inscribed: "Regards from Jock McKay"

130. Japan; late 19th century
Brass

131. S.A. Ltd., Birmingham, England; 1904-05
Silver, champlevé enamel
Inscribed: "To Fred Finch from Emmelyn Walter in Remembrance of a Happy Week at Aston Hipp: Mar. 18th, 1918"

132. Italy; early 20th century
Gilt-metal filigree

133.



134.

135.

136.

A series of fine matchsafes of Norwegian and Russian origin are of cloisonné enamel in which different colors are distinctly shown in a metal network. Several of the Russian boxes are from the workshops of the great jeweler Carl Fabergé. Fine work in enamel was also produced by French, British, and Viennese craftsmen. Niello (a black substance inlaid in silver) of French and English origin accounts for several unusually decorative matchsafes, and there are several examples in piqué work (tortoiseshell inlaid with silver and gold). Hundreds of boxes are hallmarked British silver, some with enamel emblems on the lids, and a few are worked in gold.

Many matchsafes in the Brener Collection have not yet been identified by designer, manufacturer, or place of origin, and the dates of many examples have to be established. The history of design is best pursued by the close study and comparison of numerous examples. Matchsafes, typical products of the Victorian-Edwardian period, afford an opportunity for studying the design of everyday objects. The Brener Collection's extraordinary size and range assure that it will be of perpetual interest and delight.

Jerry E. Patterson

137.

133. Possibly Eastern Europe; about 1900
Silver, basse taille and painted enamel

134. United States; early 20th century
Silver, cloisonné enamel

135. Probably Continental, hallmarked Birmingham, England; 1902–03
Silver, basse taille and painted enamel

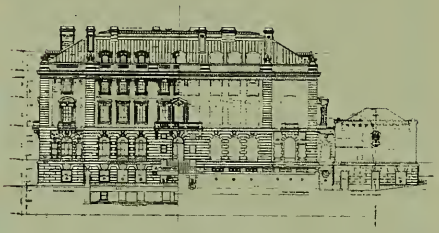
136. Gorham Corp., United States; 1913
Silver, enamel

137. Tiffany and Co., New York; about 1900
Silver, niello, copper inlay

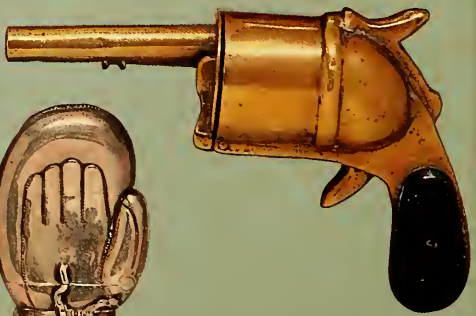
Probably England; late 19th century
Porcelain, enamel decoration

502001

Cooper-Hewitt Museum



2 East 91st Street New York NY 10028



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Matchsafes in the collection of the Coop